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- (1) Former Prime Minister Abe in meeting with U.S. Vice President Biden supports the President's nuclear policy

MAINICHI (Online edition) (Full)
April 16, 2009

By Masaya Nogawa in Washington

Former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who is visiting the United States, met with Vice President Biden at the White House where he handed over a letter addressed to President Obama from Prime Minister Taro

Aso expressing support for the President's policy intention to head toward eliminating all nuclear weapons by ratifying the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).

In their meeting, Abe stressed his backing by saying, "If the U.S. ratifies the CTBT, it would have an enormous impact in the world." The Vice President replied, "Japan's support is extremely important," welcoming it as material to persuade those in the U.S. opposed to ratification.

The Vice President also discussed the United Nations Security Council's presidential statement that condemned North Korea for launching a ballistic missile. He highly praised Japan's response, saying: "It important for its extremely severe contents. If Japan had not participated as a member of the Council and played a major role, it would never have been adopted." On the abduction issue, he promised his cooperation, saying, "We support Japan's position."

Abe during the meeting also touched on the visit to Japan by President Obama expected this fall, saying, "Japan is the only country ever to be atom bombed. I would like him to visit Japan with that in mind." Although this would seem to be his way of subtly floating the suggestion that the President visit Hiroshima when he comes to Japan, the Vice President, according to a briefing from the Japanese side, reportedly did not refer to any places he would visit.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Kawamura: "It is not being considered by the government"

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Chief Cabinet Secretary Kawamura, during his press conference on the morning of April 16, said this about the possibility of U.S. President Obama visiting Hiroshima when he comes to Japan this fall: "He is likely to come to Japan fully aware that Japan is the only country to be atom bombed, and that the United States is the only country to have used an atom bomb." However, he added, "At this point, there is no consideration being given by the government (to his visiting Hiroshima)."

(2) Visit to Hawaii by Imperial couple and Pearl Harbor becomes an "issue"

SUNDAY MAINICHI (Pp 220 & 221) (Excerpts)
April 19, 2009

By Hidemi Igarashi

The Emperor and Empress have visited more than 30 countries in 20 years, since the Emperor assumed the Imperial Throne. The Imperial couple will visit Canada and Hawaii in July. There was a recent fuss about a Kyodo News Agency's wire report -- "A visit to Pearl Harbor by the Emperor and Empress is being looked into" -- which the Imperial Household Agency totally denied. A delicate issue may emerge from this fuss.

On March 2, many local newspapers such as The Hokkaido Shimbun Press and The Chugoku Shimbun carried in their morning editions such headlines as: "Visit to Pearl Harbor being looked into"; and, "Closure to be brought to postwar Japan-U.S. history." The local newspapers carried the news as distributed by Kyodo from Washington.

Although it has been informally decided that the Emperor and Empress will visit Canada and Hawaii, the details of their trips have not been revealed as of March 2. According to the Kyodo dispatch, the Japanese and U.S. governments are coordinating schedules for the Imperial couple to pay a visit to Pearl Harbor. Kyodo's information came from "sources connected to Japan-U.S. relations."

Last year, Lower House Speaker Yohei Kono visited the USS Arizona Memorial to reciprocate for a visit to Hiroshima by U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi. However, no successive Japanese prime ministers have ever visited Pearl Harbor. If the Imperial couple visited that site, it would be an historic event.

However, the Imperial Household Agency immediately denied the media reports. A source connected with the agency said:

"As of March 1, when Kyodo distributed the news, the Agency received inquiries from news companies and broadcasters. The Agency has answered that the Imperial couple will not visit Pearl Harbor and that a visit is not being looked into."

On March 12, the Agency gave a lecture about the Imperial couple's tour. In it, Grand Master of the Ceremonies Koichi Haraguchi once more denied media reports.

Kyodo distributed the news that said: "According to Grand Master of the Ceremonies Haraguchi, the Emperor and the Empress will not visit Pearl Harbor. The purpose of their Hawaii visit is not to pay respects to the war dead."

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The Imperial couple will visit Canada, as they have received an invitation. The purpose of their visit to Hawaii is to attend an event for the 50th anniversary of a scholarship program that was established on the occasion of their marriage.

The Imperial couple visited Hawaii in June 1994. At that time, a Pearl Harbor visit was planned. The Foreign Ministry looked into the possibility of their offering flowers at the USS Arizona Memorial. The ministry, however, met with opposition. Therefore, the plan was shelved.

A source connected to the Imperial Household Agency said:

"I presume that Kyodo's news was written by a correspondent in Washington, and the correspondent heard such a story from a Foreign Ministry official at the Japanese Embassy in Washington who wants the Emperor and the Empress to visit [Pearl Harbor]."

A journalist pointed out:

"There must be a pro-Japanese group in Washington who think that since the Royal couple went to the Punchbowl National Cemetery, they would be able to visit Pearl Harbor next time. On the Japanese side, as well, there must be those who are considering the possibility of a visit to Pearl Harbor by the Imperial couple. It would not be surprising to think that a visit to Pearl Harbor by the Emperor and the Empress could become a promising 'diplomatic card' that might lead to a visit to Hiroshima by President Barack Obama. It would not be out of the question for President Obama, who is calling for a world without nuclear weapons, to visit Hiroshima."

The journalist means that if the leaders of Japan and the United States visited Pearl Harbor and Hiroshima, the bilateral relationship would be strengthened further.

The Emperor and the Empress visited China in 1992; Okinawa in 1993; Iwo Jima in 1994; and Saipan in 2005. So, would be possible for them to visit Pearl Harbor?

Keio University Prof. Hidehiko Ogasawara, an expert in Japanese political history, commented:

"Different from Saipan and other places, Pearl Harbor is a special place. Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor prior to the declaration of a state of war became a problem in view of international law. Since there is an interpretation that America had obtained information about Japan's surprise attack in advance, this is a historically complicated issue. The present Constitution states that the Emperor is the symbol of the state and the people and that the Emperor does not have powers related to government. However, a visit to Pearl Harbor is unavoidably related to responsibility for the war. The Foreign Ministry must have the idea of trying to politically exploit a visit to Pearl Harbor by the Emperor. However, the Imperial Household Agency thinks that political activities by the Emperor should be avoided at all costs."

Haruki Wada, a historian and professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo, said:

"America is the friendliest country for Japan. It is only natural for human being to offer flowers to console the spirits of deceased Hawaiians. I assume that the Emperor and the Empress think so, too."

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Although it is not easy to realize such a visit, we should think that their visit to Pearl Harbor would produce positive effects for Japan and the United States. I also hope that a visit to South Korea by the Imperial couple will be realized."

(3) Who should play main role, MSDF or JCG? Should prior Diet approval be mandatory? Gulf exists between ruling and opposition camps over antipiracy legislation

ASAHI (Page 4) (Excerpts)
April 16, 2009

Jun Tabuse, Hisashi Ishimatsu

The ruling and opposition parties kicked off their debate on antipiracy legislation yesterday at the House of Representatives' piracy and terrorism special committee. Who should play the central role in taking antipiracy measures in waters off Somalia, the Japan Coast Guard (JCG) or the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF)? What role should the Diet play? The government, ruling parties, and opposition parties remain divided on solutions to these issues. There are no signs of compromises.

In yesterday's question-and-answer session, Hiroshi Kawauchi of the major opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) pressed the government hard, saying, "We cannot cast aside the public's speculation that SDF dispatch is a foregone conclusion."

The major difference between the plans produced by the government and the DPJ is who should play the main role in carrying out antipiracy measures. Both plans are based on the notion that the JCG would play the central role in principle. At the same time, the government plan is designed to allow the defense minister to issue an order to the SDF in situations that [the JCG] finds difficult to handle. The DPJ plan stipulates: "SDF troops are to carry out activities under orders from the antipiracy headquarters to be established."

After confirming that the JCG has two large patrol boats comparable to MSDF destroyers, Kawauchi challenged the government, asking, "Why can't the JCG play the central role?" In response, Land, Infrastructure, and Transport Minister Kazuyoshi Kaneko rejected the option, saying: "In view of the distance from Japan, weapons the pirates possess, and measures by the militaries of other countries, this would be difficult under the current situation." The JCG has resisted playing the central role by presenting estimates that its mission in waters off Somalia would require five patrol boats that would cost 175 billion yen and take four years to build.

The involvement of the Diet is another point at issue. The government plan, which defines the SDF's activities as part of maritime policing operations, requires the Defense Ministry to report to the Diet when approving an antipiracy mission and when the mission is over. Meanwhile, the DPJ plan requires prior Diet approval of the overseas dispatch of Japanese troops. The DPJ's Koichi Takemasa argued: "The Diet must play an appropriate role from the viewpoint of civilian control."

The question of limitations to maritime policing activities is also a point of contention. This issue has surfaced in two cases in which the MSDF destroyers provided protection to foreign vessels that were not subject to escort.

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Kantoku Teruya of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) pressed the

government, arguing: "If this is allowed, MSDF personnel who are on the mission based on Article 82 of the SDF Law would end up committing irregularities." Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada fended off Teruya's criticism, saying: "The action was taken from a humanitarian perspective without the use of force, and what you said will not happen."

Meanwhile, the Diet affairs committee chairmen of the DPJ, SDP and the People's New Party met yesterday. In the session, the DPJ sought the other two parties' support for its antipiracy plan, and they took it to their parties. In yesterday's question-and-answer session, Gen Nakatani, who heads the LDP's antipiracy committee, expressed his eagerness for revision talks, saying: "We would like to conduct substantial deliberations, such as constructive revision talks."

(4) U.S. still exploring possibility of dialogue policy line: DPRK's hard-line within range of expectations

NIKKEI (Page 6) (Full)
April 16, 2009

It is becoming clearer that despite its hard-line response toward Pyongyang, the Obama administration is maintaining a policy line of pursuing a dialogue with that country. The DPRK has announced its decision to opt out of the Six-Party Talks on North Korea's nuclear ambitions in opposition to the UN Security Council (UNSC) president's statement. However, senior officials at the White House and Department of State hinted at responding to direct talks with DPRK, even while criticizing the North's confrontational response. It has been three months since the Obama administration was launched, and as it tackled serious diplomatic issues, it seems motivated by a desire to avoid any strains in Northeast Asia. Press Secretary Gibbs at the outset of a press conference on April 14 read out the U.S. government's stance on the North Korea issue. The statement criticized North Korea as moving in the wrong direction, but it also underscored the efficacy of the Six-Party Talks and dialogue.

Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) Vice President Seiji Maehara at the entrance of the State Department building about two hours after the meeting mentioned Special Representative for North Korea Policy Special Bosworth's remark that the U.S. will respond to direct talks with the North, if deemed appropriate. Shortly after that, State Secretary Hillary Clinton after meeting with the Georgian foreign minister told reporters, "Eventually, there will be an opportunity to hold talks with North Korea."

North Korea until April 14 has repeatedly revealed its hard-line stance concerning the Six-Party Talks and observers at its nuclear facility. Secretary Clinton exchanged views on the North Korea issue with Vice President Biden at a regular breakfast meeting. This suggests that the White House and the Department of State coordinated views regarding the moves of the North.

Washington's move can be taken as riding on the North's calculation to have the U.S. engage in direct talks with it. However, the Obama administration had expected such a response from DPRK. Maintaining a policy course to hold talks with the North was, in a way, also a predetermined policy.

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With his 100th day in office close at hand, President Obama noted in a speech that there are signs of his economic policy making headway. He is entering the stage of making an overview of the initial phase of his political administration. The Middle East peace process is to resume in June. Nuclear disarmament talks with Russia are expected in July. The work for the pullout of U.S. forces stationed in Iraq and the reinforcement of the Afghan front will soon start in force. He will also get down to talks with Iran.

To have strains mounting at such a time in Northeast Asia would not be desirable for the promotion of those other diplomatic and security policies. This factor is presumably behind the Obama administration's adhering to a dialogue policy line.

Washington is pinning high hopes on China, the chair of the Six-Party Talks. The ultimate objective of U.S.-North Korea talks is to have the North return to the Six-Party Talks and make as much progress on the nuclear issue as possible. In that sense, the U.S. and China share the same position. Press Secretary Gibbs clearly expressed the U.S.'s expectations for China, noting, "President Obama hopes that China will play a constructive role."

(5) Former Chief Cabinet Secretary Machimura reveals that he had expressed view that moving Futenma replacement facility to offshore site was within Japan's permissible scope

RYUKYU SHIMPO (Page 1) (Full)
April 16, 2009

Michiyo Yonamine

Former Chief Cabinet Secretary Nobutaka Machimura gave an interview to the Ryukyu Shimpo at the House of Representatives No. 1 Office Building yesterday. In it, touching on the planned relocation of the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station, Machimura said: "Governor Hirokazu Nakaima's wishes must be respected as much as possible. Moving [the relocation site] 50 meters or several dozen meters [from the plan agreed upon by the United States and Japan] is within the permissible scope of a decision by Japan as a sovereign state and that that would not require the government to redo the [environmental impact] assessment." He thus indicated that the relocation site should be allowed to be moved up to 55 meters further offshore without redoing the environmental impact assessment. Machimura also revealed that in 2008 when he had been serving as chief cabinet secretary, he held talks with Governor Nakaima behind the scenes and that a settlement was about to be reached on making minor changes within the permissible scope based on a plan to move the relocation site to an offshore area.

Coordination with the governor last fall

It is the first time that what had been arranged between the government and Okinawa behind the scene for the relocation of Futenma Air Station has been revealed. In a Futenma relocation consultative council meeting on April 8, Chief Cabinet Secretary Takeo Kawamura cited Machimura's comment, saying, "We keep in mind the local wishes, including the moving of the location." As evidenced by this, the present administration has a stance of giving consideration to the governor, as was the previous administration.

In the interview, Machimura indicated that the governor's

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cooperation was essential for realizing the relocation, saying: "Not all the governor's wishes would come true, and things do not move forward unless broad local understanding is obtained. Landfill work for using surface areas, the last step for the relocation, requires the governor's seal of approval. When the prefectural police make moves, the response to the anti-base group differs largely depending on whether or not there is the governor's backup."

Machimura also explained that in the fall of 2008, he had envisaged that the matter would be settled on moving the relocation site to an offshore area. He also said that the government had looked for ways to specify in its preliminary environmental assessment report that the replacement facility shall be moved further offshore and that the moving distance shall be discussed later on. The government sought then U.S. Deputy Defense Undersecretary Richard Lawless' understanding of the offshore plan, according to Machimura.

Machimura also indicated that he had included the Futenma issue in the list of top priorities for his successor, Takeo Kawamura, and that he advised Kawamura: "You should hold an introductory consultative council meeting at an early time so as not to send the wrong message that the current administration is slighting Okinawa."

ZUMWALT